



PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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CONGRESS APPROVES COMPENSATION PLAN FOR NUCLEAR WEAPONS WORKERS

Today, U.S. Representative Floyd Spence, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, announced that the House and Senate had reached agreement on a compensation plan for the thousands of workers made ill by exposure to toxic or radioactive materials when working on the nation's nuclear weapons programs.

"Thousands of workers were exposed to dangerous levels of radiation, beryllium, and other toxic substances while they worked on our nation's nuclear weapons programs. A number of these individuals have become sick from illnesses that may be traced to that exposure," said Spence. "These men and women helped America win the Cold War, and they deserve help. The plan endorsed by the conference committee is a fitting response to the need to compensate these employees or their survivors for the sacrifice resulting from their service."

The legislation requires the President, by March 15, 2001, to submit to Congress a legislative proposal that identifies the types and amounts of compensation for individuals and the procedures for providing the compensation. If the Congress does not act by July 31, 2001 to enact a compensation program, the employees exposed to beryllium and radiation will be entitled to a lump sum payment of \$150,000 and medical care for their disease. If the employee did not survive to receive the benefit, survivors of these employees are entitled to the payment.

"It is the least we can do," said Spence. "Many of these employees have been waiting years to be recognized and compensated."

The legislation also covers employees who were made ill digging tunnels used for nuclear weapons testing in Nevada and Alaska. These employees are also entitled to a one-time payment of \$150,000 and medical care unless the President specifically certifies otherwise. Additionally, uranium miners who are currently compensated at a lesser rate under the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act will be paid an additional \$50,000 (for a total compensation of \$150,000). They will also be eligible for medical care.

(MORE)

The Congressional plan provides \$275 million to established the Energy Employees' Occupational Illness Compensation Program to provide timely, uniform, and adequate compensation to employees or their survivors for illnesses incurred during the performance of their duties for the DOE nuclear weapons program. The package includes \$250 million from the Treasury's General Fund to establish the Energy Employees' Occupational Illness Compensation Fund and \$25 million to establish and administer the compensation program during fiscal year 2001.

The legislation is included as part of the conference report accompanying the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2001 (H.R. 4205). The conference report awaits a final vote in the House and Senate. The legislation will then be sent to the President for signature.

A summary of the major provisions included in H.R. 4205 is available on the House Armed Services Committee homepage at <http://www.house.gov/hasc/>.

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